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ABSTRACT

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Television And Its News:
A Discrepancy Examination

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Television And Its News:
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This exploratory endeavor utilized a functional discrepancy model of mass communication research to examine the audience experience with television generally and its news in particular. Specifically, gratifications sought from television in general and gratifications perceived as being obtained from television news are analyzed for a random sample of respondents. Canonical Correlation and multiple regression techniques provided additional analysis capability for the survey data. Results indicated that discrepancy and gratification measures were found to have low prediction power of television news consumption.

Noted scholars of the functionalistic paradigm in mass communication research have postulated that different individuals in various cultural groups have different needs, therefore, the uses of and gratifications from mass media by individuals in these groups will probably also vary.[1] In the area of specific media content, Gans was a pioneer in the effort to encourage more systematic empirical audience research of the public's use of broadcast news programs.[2] Gans argued that it is essential to know how the audience watches and uses broadcast news programming, to what extent they comprehend what they see and hear, and what effect it has upon them.[3]

A few empirical studies have appeared addressing some of the questions posed by early functionalism supporters in television news research. The preliminary evidence thus far indicates that individual dependence on specific media sources for news is a critical variable in understanding media effects.

Ganta empirically examined how individual uses and gratifications affect recall of television news.[4] Wade and Schramm found that persons who reported the broadcast media were their major sources of news were less well informed on a variety of issues than were print users.[5] Becker, et al., found that television news dependency was associated with lower levels of knowledge about local

affairs while newspaper dependency indicated a reverse relationship.[6] Levy, in a study of opinion leadership and television news uses, found that television news which meets both the cognitive and personal needs of opinion leaders could be used by them to interpret and reinterpret public events for non-opinion leaders.[7]

Since little empirical research exists on the audience experience with television news programming, the present study provides an exploratory investigation of the audience experience with television news. General questions examined in this study included:

1. What type of differences, if any, exists in the respondents' use (gratifications sought from) television in general, and their use of (gratifications perceived as being obtained from) television news?

2. Can the differences or discrepancies (if any) between uses and gratifications above be used to predict exposure to television news?

3. Is there an underlying structure of functions and/or dysfunctions which exist among the respondents pertaining to their use of television, especially in the area of TV news?

4. Can negative reactions, or active avoidance items be used to predict exposure to television newscasts?

Methodology

The population utilized for this study was a random sample of individuals in a mid-western city. A total of

316 respondents were selected through random sampling techniques. Ten research assistants were trained to distribute and collect the self-administered survey questionnaires. Data were collected during the late summer and early fall of 1980. Since sixteen questionnaires were deemed unuseable, the final total N was 300.

A functional discrepancy model of mass communication was developed by Palmgreen and Rayburn and was utilized in this investigation.[8] The model is depicted below.

Insert Figure 1 about here

where:

E = an exposure measure for some medium, program, content type, etc.

GS_i = a measure of the extent to which the i^{th} gratification is sought.

GO_i = a measure of the extent to which the i^{th} gratification is perceived to be obtained.

n = the number of gratifications under consideration.

According to Palmgreen and Rayburn, their model states that exposure (or consumption) "...is a function of the average absolute discrepancy between the gratifications which the audience member is seeking, and the extent to which he perceives he is obtaining these gratifications."[9]

Two sets of Likert five-point scales were utilized in this study in relation to the functional discrepancy model described above. These scales were: gratifications sought from television in general, and gratifications perceived as

as being obtained from television news. In addition, a third Likert five-point scale was utilized which examined the possible avoidance attributes of audience members in regard to viewing television news. As McLeod and Becker argued:

> "While most of the work to date has dealt with the positive orientations such as gratifications sought from media, it is no less logical to suppose that the aversive reactions of audience members to various aspects of media content may also determine the effects of exposure."[10]

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilized to check the inter-item reliability of the three Likert scales employed in this study. The psychometric properties of the scales were found to be satisfactory. The avoidance scale has a coefficient of .77; the gratification sought scale has a coefficient of.86; and the gratifications obtained scale has a coefficient of .83. The items used in the three Likert scales were formulated from an initial pilot and from the literature in gratification research.

Results and Discussion

Social theorists have suggested that television and its news programs now provide the mass public with a powerful interpretation of the world.[11] This exploratory investigation examines viewing of news programs by an audience through a functional discrepancy model.

The significance test inherent to such a model is the t-test. Table one provides an item-by-item mean comparison of

Table one about here

the gratifications respondents seek and obtain. All thirteen gratification item mean comparisons are statistically significant. These mean differences are examined in reference to the audience and the functions this mass medium serves.

Wright, among others, has postulated that one function served by mass communication for the individual is the transmission of cultural norms and social values to succeeding generations.[12] Respondents in this study indicate that television in general helps them to learn about people, places, and things (M = 3.70). This is supportive of the function of cultural transmission. In addition, respondents also agree that television news provides them with this type of function and/or gratification (M = 3.99). The significance of the difference (or the discrepancy between these means) is at the .0001 level. Howard, among others, has suggested that television is biased in its presentation of news.[13] Also, various scholars in mass communication, popular culture, and sociology contend that television in general is presenting an unrealistic view of life in this society. If these views are accurate, then the medium of TV, including newscasts, can be dysfunctional to members of the viewing audience.

Respondents indicate that television in general helps them to form opinions about various aspects of society (M = 3.48). They also indicate that television news especially helps them to formulate opinions about various things (M = 3.67). Thus, both television generally and television news in particular

provide these individuals with what Wright[14] and Lasswell[15] have described as the surveillance function of the mass media. Critics of television news contend that the medium cannot provide enough detailed content to keep their viewers adequately informed; rather, television news simply provides a summary of news events on various levels of national, international, regional, or local interest.

Respondents indicate that television generally does not help them to understand other people's problems (M = 2.88). However, television news does provide them with an understanding of (cognitive function) others' problems (M = 3.42). Thus, these individuals use the television news medium (as opposed to other program types) as a surveillance function which perhaps aids them in understanding different social and cultural groups (a social utility function).

Television in general is not used by the respondents to forget their own problems (M = 2.73). This is in contrast to the notion held by some scholars and critics that people use television to escape; also, television news does not provide these individuals with a diversion or escape function (M = 2.27). A significant difference between these means thus reinforces the lack of diversion uses of TV news by this sample.

Respondents did not agree that television in general provides them with topics to discuss with other people (M = 2.88). However, these individuals do agree that television news provides them with topics of discussion (M = 3.36). Thus, Lasswell[16] and Wright's[17] surveillance function receives additional support

in relation to television news.

The data from this study indicates that television in general does not make respondents feel better prepared to talk with friends (M = 2.66). However, the respondents do agree that television news makes them feel better prepared to talk with friends (M = 3.18).

Respondents indicate that they do watch television in general to relax (M = 3.34), yet they do not see television news as providing gratifications toward the need for relaxation (M = 2.46). This discrepancy supports the lack of a relaxation function for these viewers of television news.

Respondents indicate that viewing television in general does not provide them a companionship function by making them feel less lonely (M = 2.66). And, this sample does not see television news as providing a companionship function (M = 2.43).

Respondents do not agree that viewing television in general provides them with an opportunity for family and friends to be together (M = 2.54). In addition, they reject the use of TV news as social utility function for family and friends (M = 2.37).

Respondents agree that television in general helps them pass the time (M = 3.03). However, television news does not help these respondents pass the time (M = 2.63). In addition, these individuals do not use television generally (M = 2.96) and television news especially (M = 2.50) when they are bored.

As mentioned earlier, many people feel that television provides an escape or diversion function. While this may be true for some individuals, the findings for this sample do not support

this contention. However, this group does strongly agree that they watch television to be entertained (M = 3.55), although they indicate that entertainment gratifications are not provided by television news (M = 2.74). And finally, respondents from this study indicate that both television generally (M = 4.01) and television newscasts (M = 4.20) aid them in the surveillance function of staying abreast of current events.

The above discussion of results from the t-test analysis indicated whether a difference or discrepancy of means existed in the gratification sought and obtained scales. The method of canonical correlation allows additional analysis of the interrelationship of the several variables in each of the two scales.

Canonical Correlation

The canonical correlation analysis relates gratifications individuals seek from television in general to gratifications individuals obtain from television news. The right set variables include thirteen gratifications that respondents seek from television in general. The left set variables include thirteen gratifications that respondents obtain from TV news.

Table 2 about here

The first root shows a canonical correlation of .8201 and significance at the .0001 level. The canonical component loadings for the right set show a positive correlation between those individuals who seek companionship (to feel less lonely, .4585) and those who seek social utility (to feel better prepared to talk, .2916) from television in general. Canonical

component loadings for the left set show a positive correlation between those individuals who obtain companionship (.4071) and those who obtain social utility (.3404) from TV news. The between set correlation of root one indicates a strong positive correlation (.8201) between those individuals who seek companionship and social utility from television in general and those who obtain companionship and social utility from television news.

The second root shows a canonical correlation of .6300 and significance at the .0001 level. The canonical component loadings for the right set show a negative correlation between those individuals who seek companionship (less lonely, -.4887) and those who seek information (current events, -.3563 and form opinions, -.3271) from television in general. The root shows a strong relationship between these individuals and those who seek social utility (be with family, .9103). This indicates that individuals who seek companionship and information do not seek social utility from television in general.

The left set variables in root 2 show a negative correlation between those individuals who obtain companionship (less lonely, -.5907) and those who obtain information (learn about people, -.3163 and form opinions, -.3009) from television news. There is a high positive loading on the use of television news to obtain social interaction (be with family, .8260).

The between set correlation of root 2 indicates a strong positive correlation (.6300) between those individuals who seek companionship and information from television in general and

those individuals who obtain companionship and information from television news. The same strong correlation is indicated between those individuals who seek social u ility from television in general and those who obtain social utility from television news. Conversely the correlation indicates that those individuals who seek companionship and information from television in general do not obtain social utility from TV news, nor do those individuals who seek social utility from television in general obtain companionship and information from television news.

The third root shows a canonical correlation of .5614 and significance at the .0001 level. The right set variables in root 3 show a moderate positive correlation between those individuals who seek information (keep up with current events, .6431) and those individuals who seek social utility (be with family, .4509) from television viewing. The root shows a relationship between these individuals and those who seek companionship (less lonely, -.3320) from television in general, indicating that those individuals who seek information and social utility are not those who seek companionship from their television viewing.

The canonical component loadings for the left set show a positive correlation between those individuals who obtain information (keep up with current events, .4818), those individuals who obtain social utility (be with family, .4606), and those individuals who obtain entertainment (.3951) from television news. The left set variables show a negative correlation

between those individuals who obtain companionship (less lonely, -.4034) and those individuals who obtain passed time (-.3489) from television news. The root relationship indicates that the individuals who obtain information, social utility, and entertainment are not the individuals who obtain companionship and passed time from television news viewing.

The between set correlation of root 3 indicates a strong positive correlation (.5614) between those individuals who seek companionship from television in general and those individuals who obtain companionship and passed time from TV news. However, it is also indicated that those individuals who seek companionship from television viewing do not obtain information, social utility, or entertainment from television news. The strong positive between set correlation also indicates that those individuals who seek information and social utility from television in general obtain information, social utility, and entertainment from television news. Conversely the correlation indicates that those individuals who seek social utility and information from television viewing do not obtain companionship and passed time from television news.

Mutliple Regression

To examine the potential prediction capability of the Likert scales and selected demographic variables, a series of regressions was performed. Through utilization of variable transformation techniques, the Likert scales were each combined into three new variables; that is, the total items in

each scale were summed to compute three new independent variables for inclusion into the regression equations (gratification sought scale = Sought; gratification obtained scale = Obtained; the avoidance scale = Avoid). A discrepancy measure (Discrep) was also computed (through variable transformation) by subtracting gratifications obtained from gratifications sought (total items, both scales). Selected demographic variables used in the regression equation included education, age, income, and sex. The dependent or criterion variable was formed through similar transformation techniques; that is, a total news consumption index was formulated from the variables concerning local and network news viewing.

Table 3 about here

Table 3 contains the results of the regression equations. The most interesting aspect of these results is that the gratifications sought and discrepancy variables were dropped from the final equation (step-wise regressions) and the avoidance gratification measure has a low partial regression coefficient (Beta = -.07). This suggests that such gratification measures have low predictive powers of television news consumption, at least with this sample of respondents. The avoidance measure, with a negative beta weight, suggests an inverse relationship between exposure and scores on the avoidance dimension; that is, the more avoidance attributes a viewer finds in his/her newswatching, the less often he/she is likely to watch TV news.

The second highest prediction variable is the gratification

obtained from television news measure (Beta = -.11), which suggests a similar inverse relationship; that is, the less gratifications obtained from television news viewing, the less often a viewer will turn to television news for need gratification or satisfaction. Education (Beta = -.04) and sex (Beta = -.01) have rather low predictive powers. Steiner found that education was a strong predictive variable of news consumption,[18] and the low predictor ability of the education measure is surprising in this sample.

Two moderate predictors of television news consumption are income (Beta = .14) and age (Beta = .10), and the age measure tends to confirm the literature findings that age determines extent and impact of exposure to television news. Thus, only one of four gratification measures proves to have moderate prediction power of TV news consumption over traditional correlates such as education and age.

Conclusion

This investigation employed the use of a recently developed functional discrepancy model for media research. Although exploratory by nature and design, the results of the survey data analysis offer some support for such a discrepancy conceptualization of uses and gratifications in mass communication research endeavors.

Besides significant t-test results, the use of canonical correlation within the functional model design allowed for additional analysis of interrelationships, and a number of

significant relationships were discussed. One disappointing aspect of this research was the fact that the multiple regression analysis did not produce stronger standard regression beta coefficients within the gratification and avoidance dimensions. The lack of prediction power of the gratification and avoidance measures in the regression equation weakens the support of a functional model approach. Thus, this discrepancy between the t-test and canonical correlation analysis and the multiple regression analysis suggests one approach to empirical investigations in future research endeavors.

Others have suggested that the ways people use the mass media mitigates possible effects from the mass media. Thus, additional efforts utilizing a functional model hopefully will contribute to the development of a stronger theoretical base in the functional vein of mass communication study. And perhaps this will improve our understanding of the communication and sociolization processes in our society.

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[17] Wright, op. cit.

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Table 1

Mean Gratification Sought (GS) And Obtained (GO)

Gratification*	Mean	T	Significance
1. (GS) I watch television because it helps me to relax. (Wathrelx)	3.34	12.22	.0001
(GO) Television newscast programs help me to relax. (Newsrelx)	2.46		
2. (GS) I watch television because it helps me to forget about my problems. (Helpforg)	2.73	6.78	.0001
(GO) Television newscast programs help me forget about my problems. (Newsforg)	2.27		
3. (GS) I watch television because it helps me to understand other people's problems. (Othrprob)	2.88	7.59	.0001
(GO) Television newscasts help me to understand other people's problems. (Newsprob)	3.42		
4. (GS) I watch television to learn about people, places, and things. (Wathlern)	3.70	4.87	.0001
(GO) Television newscasts help me to learn about people, places, and things. (Newslern)	3.99		

Table 1

(Continued)

5. (GS) I watch television to keep up with current issues and events. (Keepupns)	4.01			
(GO) Television newscasts help me to keep up with current issues and events. (Newskeep)	4.20		3.71	.0001
6. (GS) I watch television because it helps me form opinions about various things. (Formopin)	3.48			
(GO) Television newscasts help me to form opinions about various things. (Newsform)	3.67		3.41	.001
7. (GS) I watch television because it makes me feel less lonely when no one else is around. (LessLone)	2.66			
(GO) Television news helps me to feel less lonely when no one else is around. (Newslony)	2.43		4.45	.0001
8. (GS) I watch television because it provides an opportunity for family and friends to be together. (Provcppr)	2.54			
(GO) TV news viewing provides an opportunity for family and friends to be together. (Newsoppr)	2.37		3.34	.001

Table 1

(Continued)

9. (GS) I watch television because it provides me with things to talk about with other people. (Talkabot)	2.88		
(CO) TV newscasts provide me with things to talk about with other people. (Newstalk)	3.36	7.67	.0001
10. (GS) I watch television because it makes me feel better prepared to talk with friends. (Bettprep)	2.66		
(CO) TV news viewing makes me feel better prepared to talk with friends. (Newsprep)	3.18	8.92	.0001
11. (GS) I watch television to relieve boredom. (Wathbord)	2.96		
(CO) TV newscasts relieve boredom. (Newsrele)	2.50	7.17	.0001
12. (GS) I watch television because it helps pass the time. (Helppass)	3.03		
(CO) TV news helps pass the time. (Newspass)	2.63	6.23	.0001
13. (CS) I watch TV to be entertained. (Entrtain)	3.55		
(CO) TV newscasts entertain me. (Newsentr)	2.74	10.74	.0001

*Variable ID at end of each item.

Table 2

Structure For Canonical Analysis

Left Set Variables=Gratification Obtained/TV News

Right Set Variables=Gratifications Sought/TV General

Variable ID**	Root 1 R_c=.8201	Root 2 R_c=.6300	Root 3 R_c=.5614
		Left Set	
Newsrelx	-.0778	.0285	.2884
Newsforg	.0459	.0240	.0611
Newsprob	.1078	-.1186	.2556
Newslern	-.0552	-.3163*	-.0252
Newskeep	-.1441	-.1515	.4818*
Newsform	.1773	-.3009*	.0699
Newslony	.4071*	-.5907*	-.4034*
Newsoppr	.0915	.8260*	.4606*
Newstalk	.0966	.1866	-.0521
Newsprep	.3404*	.0726	-.0939
Newspass	.1904	.1671	-.3489*
Newsrele	.2069	-.0257	-.0526
Newsentr	-.1107	-.1749	.3951*
		Right Set	
Wathrelx	.0597	-.1490	-.0636
Helpforg	.0867	.0607	.0615
Helppass	.1280	-.0141	-.1656
LessLone	.4585*	-.4887*	-.3320*
Wathbord	.1360	.0257	-.2022

Table 2

(Continued)

Cthrprob	.0586	.0690	-.0316
Wathlern	-.0017	-.0729	.1161
Keepupns	-.0263	-.3563*	.6431*
Formopin	.1131	-.3271*	.0992
Provoppr	.0949	.9103*	.4509*
Talkabot	.0659	.1886	.1606
Bettprep	.2916*	.0410	-.2141
Entrtain	-.1196	-.0790	.2681

Root 1, $X^2 = 833.622$, $p < .0001$

Root 2, $X^2 = 514.939$, $p < .0001$

Root 3, $X^2 = 370.560$, $p < .0001$

*Indicates salient loadings

**Complete item identification in Table 1

Table 3

Regression Of Combined TV News Measures
On Salient Predictor Measures

Predictor	Beta	R	R^2	F	p <
Income	.14	.136	.019	5.65	.05
Age	.10	.165	.027	4.18	.05
Obtained	-.11	.190	.036	3.71	.05
Avoid	-.07	.203	.041	3.16	.05
Education	-.04	.206	.042	2.60	.05
Sex	-.01	.206	.042	2.17	.05

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Functional discrepancy model.

$$E \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{|(CS_i - CC_i)|}{n}$$